

Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Former IHS Worker Sentenced

NEWTON, IOWA -- Tia Beth Torres, 38, of Pella pleaded guilty and was sentenced Monday in Jasper County District Court on three counts of Theft in the First Degree. Fifth Judicial District Judge Sherman Philps sentenced Torres to indeterminate terms not to exceed 10 years on each of the counts. Phelps suspended the concurrent terms and placed Torres on probation for five years. Phelps also order payment of a \$1,000 fine on each of the three counts. Conditions of probation include Torres paying \$158,242.25 in restitution to Jasper County and the payment of applicable surcharges and court costs.

Torres admitted that the thefts occurred between September 1997 and mid-November 2000, when she was employed as an accounting clerk at Integrated Health Services (IHS), a licensed health care facility operated by Jasper County. The facility ceased operation on November 30, 2000, by action of the Jasper County Board of Supervisors. Torres committed the thefts by misappropriating funds intended for the facility and Jasper County to her own use.

The investigation of the Torres theft was conducted by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals= (DIA) Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, the Jasper County Sheriff's Office, the Jasper County Auditor's Office, and the Jasper County Attorney's Office. Prosecution was handled by the Iowa Attorney General's Office. The criminal investigation concluded that Torres misappropriated a total of \$158,242.25 of county funds for her own use.

Torres had been employed in the IHS business office for more than five years before she became the subject of the investigation that ended in her sentencing Monday. She had been responsible for managing the revenue accounts of the facility and the preparation of income reports for Jasper County officials. A 2001 special audit by the State Auditor's Office concluded numerous improprieties occurred in the business office operation and that the lack of proper internal controls and policies contributed to the facility's ineffective fiscal management. The special audit identified \$198,119.05 of misappropriated, questioned or unsupported transactions relating to funds maintained by the facility's business office.

A related investigation involving another former IHS employee, Patricia June Fletcher, 42, of Newton resulted in her pleading guilty to Fraudulent Practices in the Third Degree in August 2003. Fletcher is scheduled to face sentencing on her fraudulent acts on Oct. 29, also in Jasper County District Court. Fletcher was a qualified mental retardation professional-designee at the facility and has admitted to creating numerous false records relating to her spending of residents=personal funds.

The criminal case against Fletcher was investigated concurrently with the Torres investigation. In pleading guilty, Fletcher agreed to make restitution in the amount of \$1,512.68,

the full amount involved in the criminal case against her. Jasper County officials had previously concluded that Fletcher stole resident trust funds and reimbursed the residents' accounts with Jasper County funds through fraudulent means. Restitution will be made to Jasper County and not to the individual residents who were the victims of her crime. The Fletcher case was also investigated by DIA's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, and the Jasper County Sheriff, Auditor and County Attorney's offices. The Iowa Attorney General's Office prosecuted the Fletcher case, and does not anticipate any further prosecutions against former IHS employees.

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